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Echoes

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from the

Wagon Wheels

Heard at a Regimental Reunion

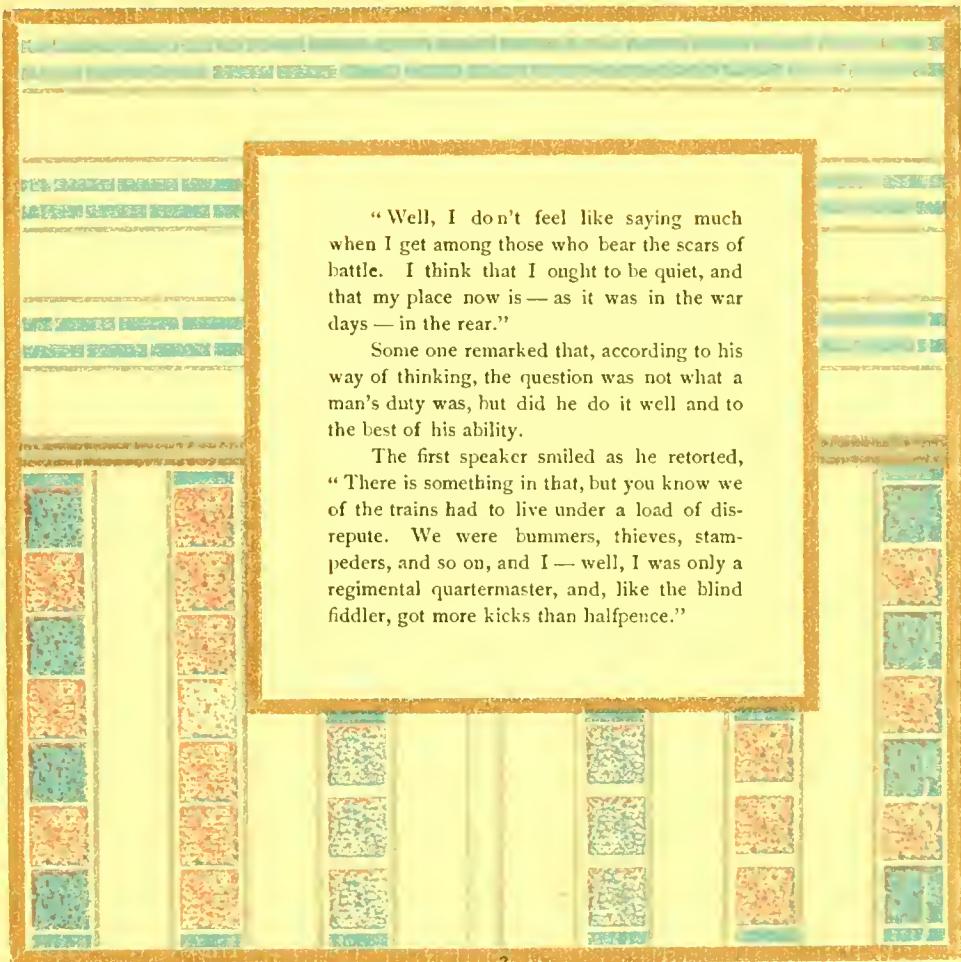
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How it Happened.

THE time was the year of grace 1880, the place a summer resort in Boston Harbor. A group of men smoking and lazily watching the waves as they splashed at their feet. One of the party, as he knocked the ashes from his pipe, said that he always liked to come down and see the boys and hear them talk over old times, even though he had not much to say about them himself.

"Why don't you?"



"Well, I don't feel like saying much when I get among those who bear the scars of battle. I think that I ought to be quiet, and that my place now is — as it was in the war days — in the rear."

Some one remarked that, according to his way of thinking, the question was not what a man's duty was, but did he do it well and to the best of his ability.

The first speaker smiled as he retorted, "There is something in that, but you know we of the trains had to live under a load of disrepute. We were bummers, thieves, stampederers, and so on, and I — well, I was only a regimental quartermaster, and, like the blind fiddler, got more kicks than halfpence."

"Very likely; but if the regimental quartermasters had not done their duty it would have gone hardly at the front. Look at Brooks Station, where Burnside got his trains snarled up, and we nearly starved to death; look at the fall advance in '63, when the flankers grew careless, and away went our ammunition train."

"That is so. I had a narrow escape once myself. Had I failed to get through it might have made serious business."

"How was that?"

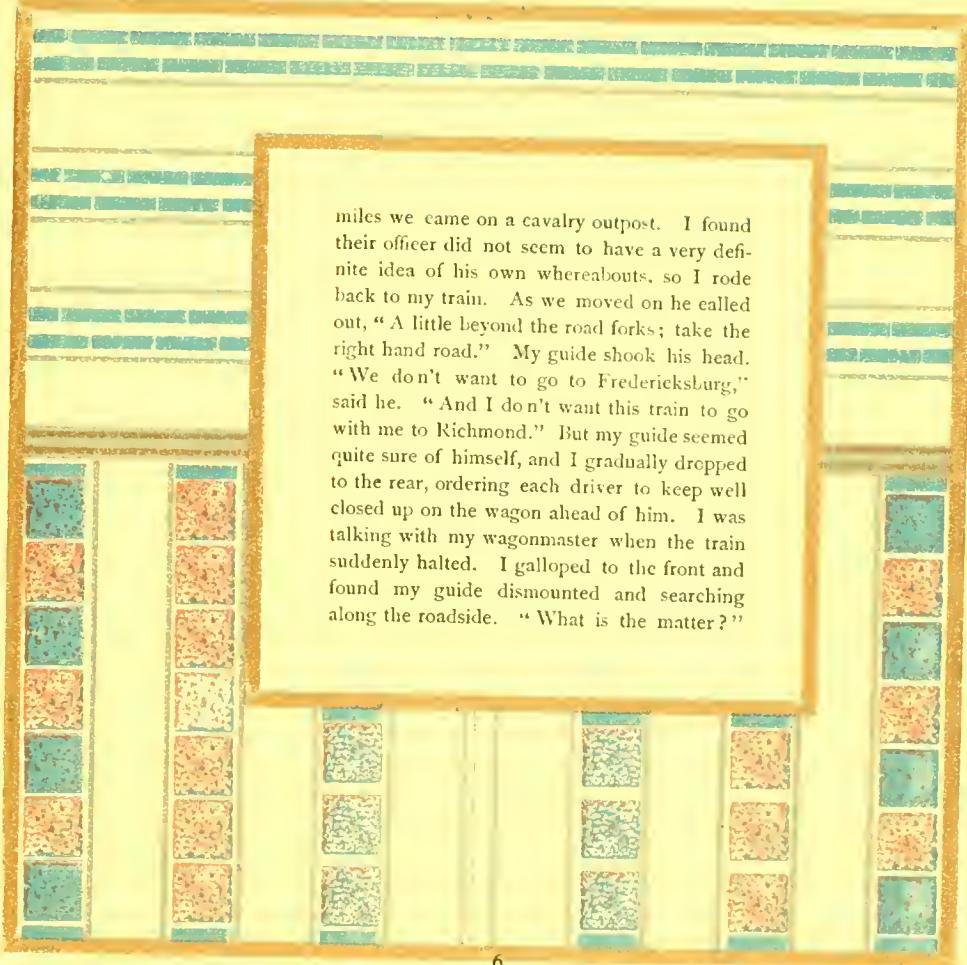
The Quartermaster's Story.

It was in '64, and I was running a pretty long train of ammunition. We had been breaking through as best we could, and all felt pretty tired one evening, when down comes an orderly with a note from Gen. Warren. I read it and whistled. It simply said

"Bring up the reserve ammunition for the Fifth Corps. Have it here before daylight. The bearer will conduct you on a safe road."

Well, there I was, the train going into park, everybody tired out, night coming on,

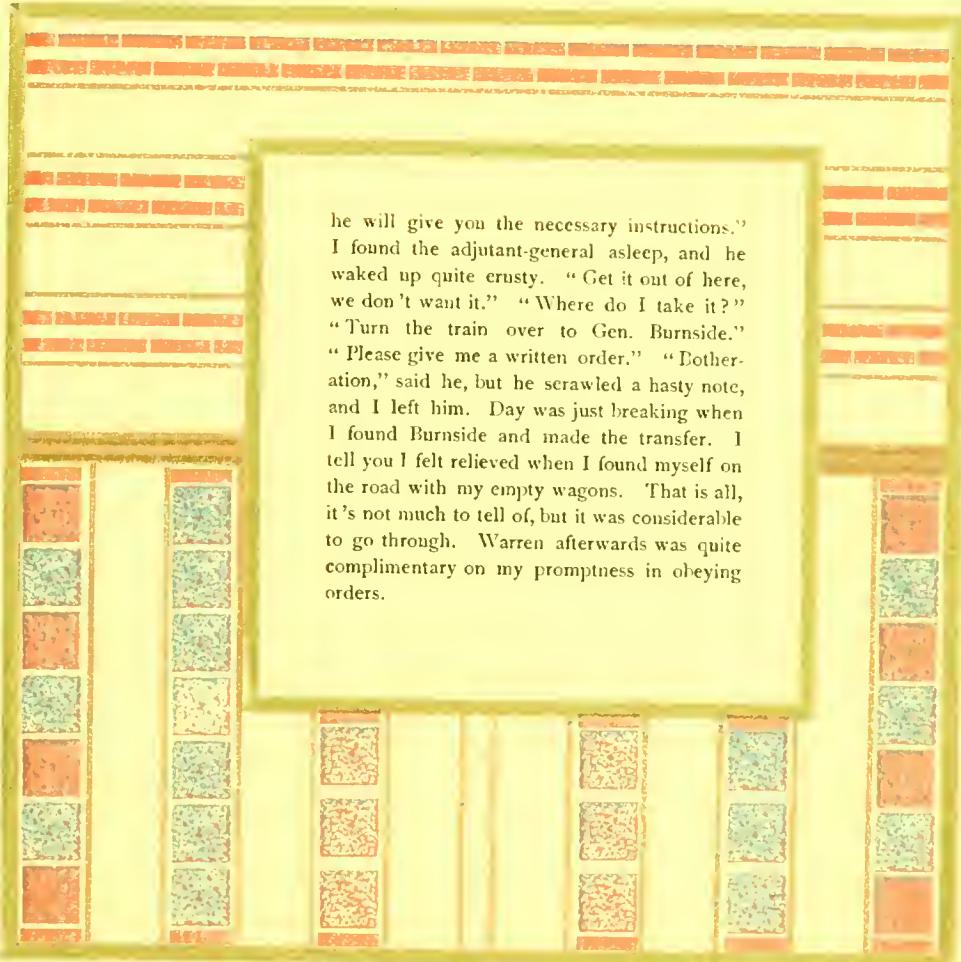
and this order staring me in the face. I told my wagonmaster to pick out the freshest mules, we hitched them into the wagons and pulled out. As we swung into the road I asked the orderly where the officer commanding the train escort was. "There is no escort," said he. I pulled up my horse and stared at him. "Does Gen. Warren expect me to cavort round at night with an ammunition train, in a strange country, and not a solitary guard?" Says the orderly, "I know nothing about that. You have your written orders, and I was instructed to pilot you on the road." "Well," said I, "is this the road?" "Yes," said he. We went on. It grew darker and darker as we rode. After we had gone about three



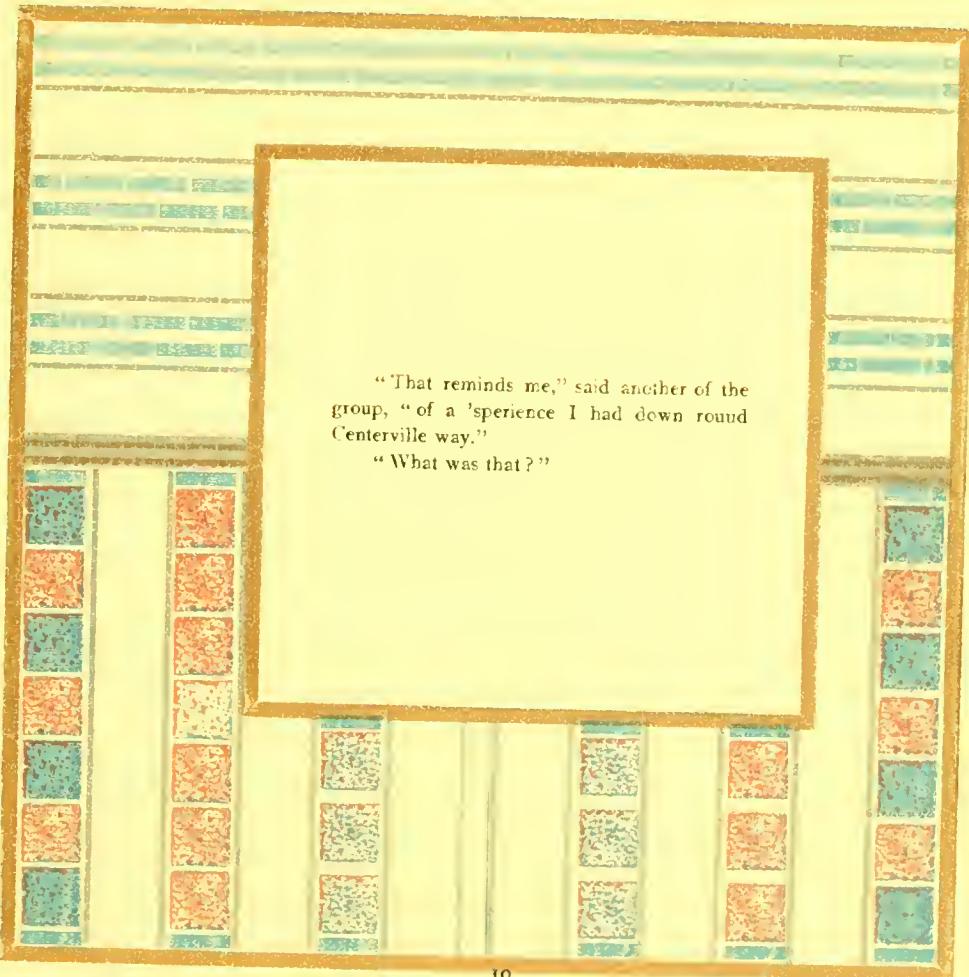
miles we came on a cavalry outpost. I found their officer did not seem to have a very definite idea of his own whereabouts, so I rode back to my train. As we moved on he called out, "A little beyond the road forks; take the right hand road." My guide shook his head. "We don't want to go to Fredericksburg," said he. "And I don't want this train to go with me to Richmond." But my guide seemed quite sure of himself, and I gradually dropped to the rear, ordering each driver to keep well closed up on the wagon ahead of him. I was talking with my wagonmaster when the train suddenly halted. I galloped to the front and found my guide dismounted and searching along the roadside. "What is the matter?"

"I don't know, but when I passed on my way down there was a picket stationed here, and I can't find him now." We rode on for half a mile, and not a picket could we find. "What kind of a guide are you?" said I. "Well, I came on this road, and my orders are to bring you on the road I came on, so we'll go ahead." I felt very uncomfortable, for it was evident that my guide had completely lost his bearings, and from the little I knew of the country I mistrusted that we were outside our lines, and were moving between the armies. After an hour's driving we heard some cavalry on our right, and I felt sure we were all done for. Very soon after we heard shots behind us. I promise you that string of wagons

moved lively. I had gone to the rear to keep things well closed up, when the train suddenly halted. I galloped to the front and found my guide conversing with a party of cavalry. He called out, "All right, it's our own patrol." We found we were two miles from Warren's headquarters, so I rode on ahead to find him and see where I was to deliver my load. I found Warren in a little house, showed him his order, and reported that I had the ammunition up. "I wish you had not brought it, we had to fall back this afternoon, and you have been travelling all night outside our lines." "Well," said I, "what do I do with it now?" "Go round to the back of the house, you will find my adjutant-general, and



he will give you the necessary instructions." I found the adjutant-general asleep, and he waked up quite crusty. "Get it out of here, we don't want it." "Where do I take it?" "Turn the train over to Gen. Burnside." "Please give me a written order." "Eotheration," said he, but he scrawled a hasty note, and I left him. Day was just breaking when I found Burnside and made the transfer. I tell you I felt relieved when I found myself on the road with my empty wagons. That is all, it's not much to tell of, but it was considerable to go through. Warren afterwards was quite complimentary on my promptness in obeying orders.



"That reminds me," said another of the group, "of a 'sprience I had down round Centerville way."

"What was that?"

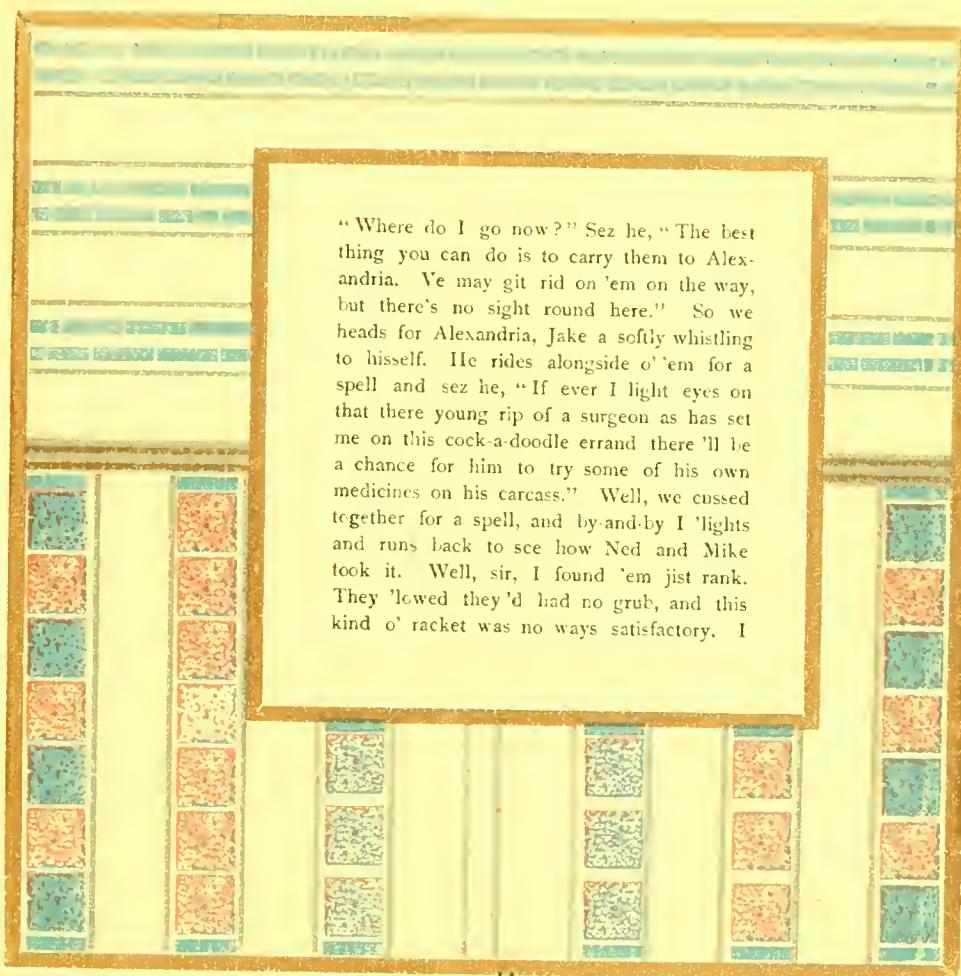
The Teamster's Story.

Why, ye see, it was like this. They'd been fighting at Bull Run, where Pope got licked so like 'tarnation, and the trains was all down to Centerville, when along comes Jake Thompson, the wagonmaster. "Rufe," sez he, "ye'll have to hitch up and drive towards the field. They want us to load up with some o' the wounded." So Ned Sykes, Mike Sullivan, and myself, we hitched up and strung out into the road, Jake riding that bay mare o' his and p'nting the way for us. There was consid'ble dunnage all along that had been

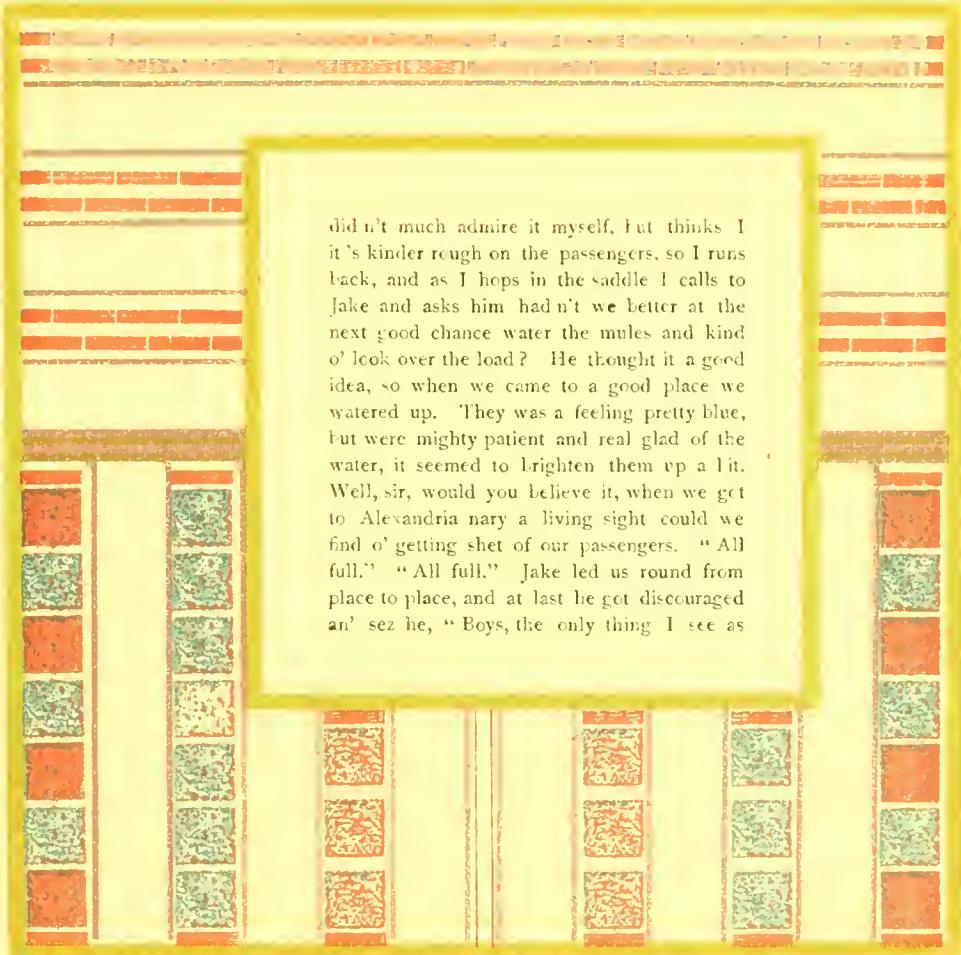
bove away, I s'pose for lack o' sufficient transportation, but we headed right en for Groveton. We picked up a young surgeon somewheres, and he rode alongside o' Jake. I had the leading wagon, so I had a good chance to see what was going on. Well sir, we by-and-by gets where they was a lying tol'able plenty, and we collared a lot o' body-snatchers as was a cavorting round promiscuous and gets our three wagons loaded up. Sez the surgeon to Jake, "Drive them to Centreville, and then come back for some more." So we heads round to the eastward, and by-and-ly we fetches Centreville.

"You must have passed through their lines, then."

Pr'aps we did. I did n't see more'n one or two Johnnies and they did n't do anything but stare at us. As I was saying, we gets to Centreville, and drives up to a hospital. The surgeon in charge comes out, and sez he, "Wot have ye got here?" Jake told him. "All full here," sez he, "I believe every wounded man has been brought to this hospital. Take them over there." And he points to a flag as was a flying over to our right. Jake drives us over there and we found their surgeon was off somewheres, but his deppity would n't hardly look at us. Leaving them with him was out o' the question. He wanted to get rid o' some as he had, let alone taking in fresh ones. Sez Jake,

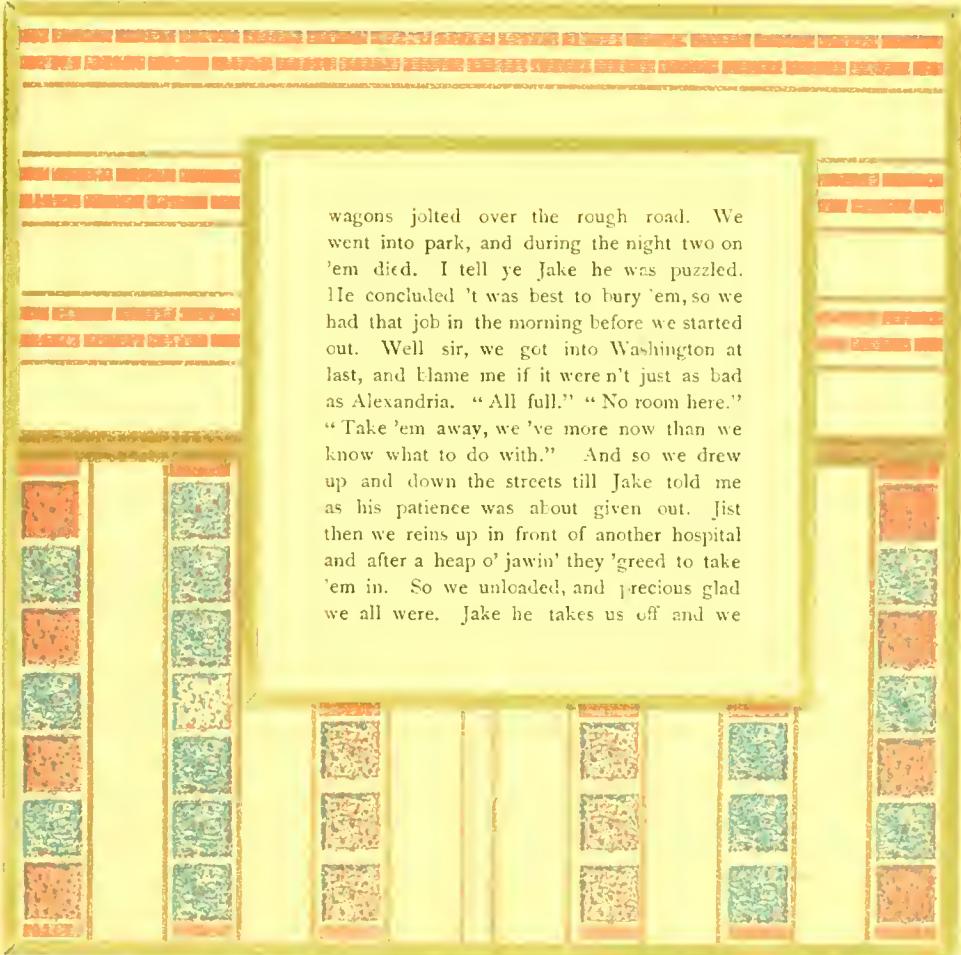


"Where do I go now?" Sez he, "The best thing you can do is to carry them to Alexandria. Ve may git rid on 'em on the way, but there's no sight round here." So we heads for Alexandria, Jake a softly whistling to hisself. He rides alongside o' em for a spell and sez he, "If ever I light eyes on that there young rip of a surgeon as has set me on this cock-a-doodle errand there'll be a chance for him to try some of his own medicines on his carcass." Well, we cussed together for a spell, and by-and-by I 'lights and runs back to see how Ned and Mike took it. Well, sir, I found 'em jist rank. They 'lowed they'd had no grub, and this kind o' racket was no ways satisfactory. I

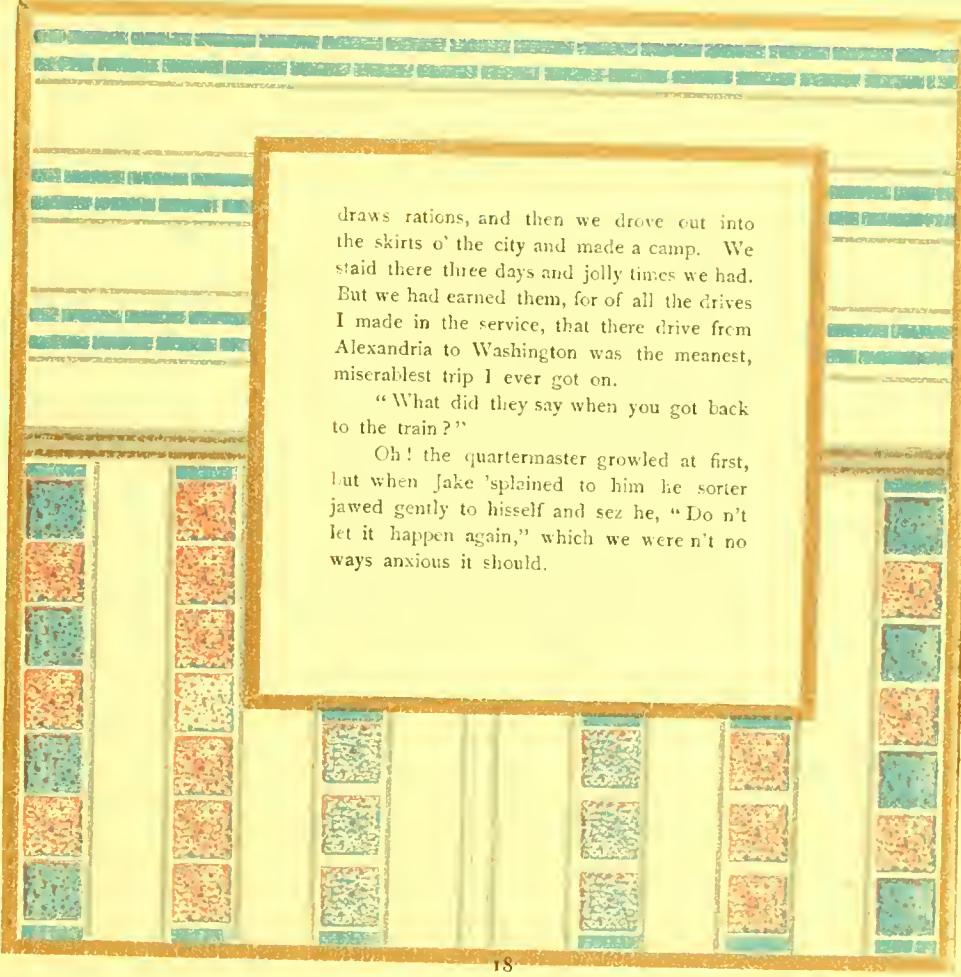


did n't much admire it myself, but thinks I
it's kinder rough on the passengers, so I runs
back, and as I hops in the saddle I calls to
Jake and asks him had n't we better at the
next good chance water the mules and kind
o' look over the load? He thought it a good
idea, so when we came to a good place we
watered up. They was a feeling pretty blue,
but were mighty patient and real glad of the
water, it seemed to brighten them up a lit.
Well, sir, would you believe it, when we got
to Alexandria nary a living sight could we
find o' getting shet of our passengers. "All
full," "All full." Jake led us round from
place to place, and at last he got discouraged
an' sez he, "Boys, the only thing I see as

we can do is to head for Washington." Ned Sykes he swore up and down he'd go no farther, but Jake and I sort o' pacified him. Mike he didn't say much 'cept as how it was downright killing the team. However at last we pulled out of the cussed town and halted and got some supper and fixed up our freight. We got some old straw fer 'em to lay on and made 'em as comfortable like as we could. Then we started. Jake had tried to get a surgeon to go with us, but he could n't get one, so we lit out all by ourselves. I tell ye that was a tough ride. Them wounded men seemed to have give up altogether, and it was tough I tell you to hear 'em groaning and lamenting as the



wagons jolted over the rough road. We went into park, and during the night two on 'em died. I tell ye Jake he was puzzled. He concluded 't was best to bury 'em, so we had that job in the morning before we started out. Well sir, we got into Washington at last, and blame me if it were n't just as bad as Alexandria. "All full," "No room here." "Take 'em away, we've more now than we know what to do with." And so we drew up and down the streets till Jake told me as his patience was about given out. Jist then we reins up in front of another hospital and after a heap o' jawin' they 'greed to take 'em in. So we unloaded, and precious glad we all were. Jake he takes us off and we



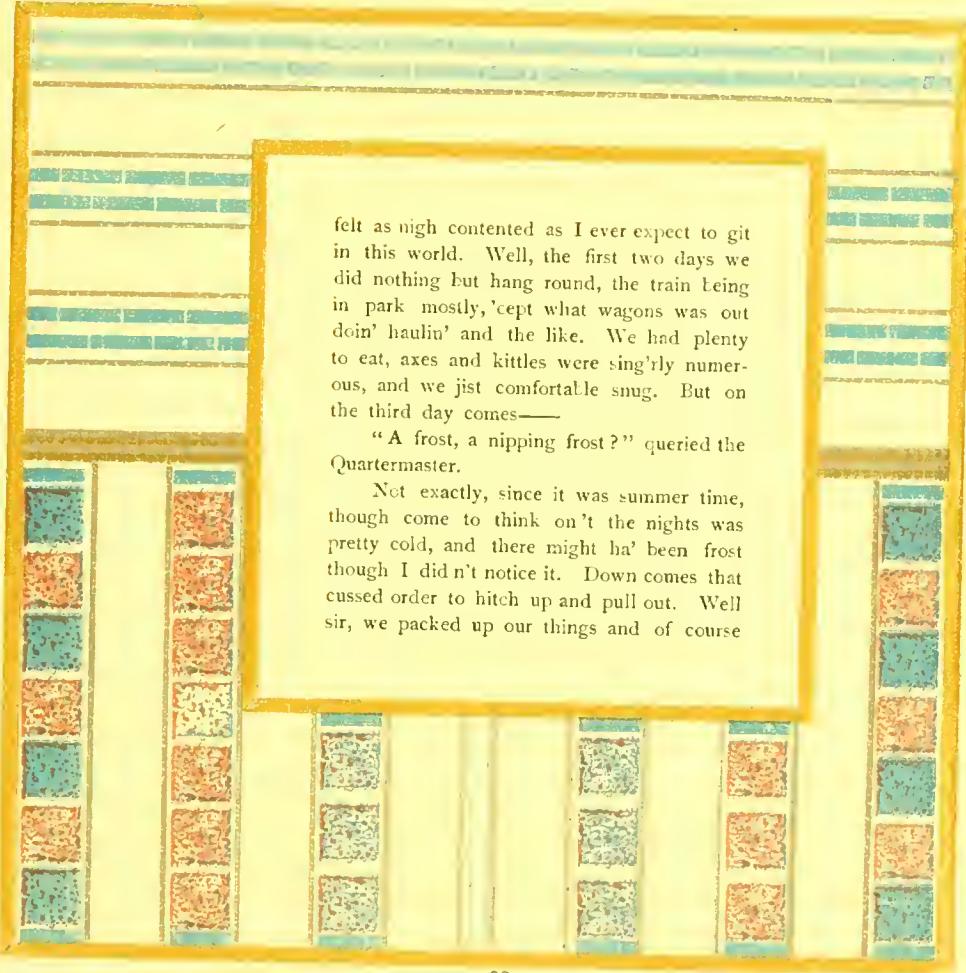
draws rations, and then we drove out into the skirts o' the city and made a camp. We staid there three days and jolly times we had. But we had earned them, for of all the drives I made in the service, that there drive from Alexandria to Washington was the meanest, miserablest trip I ever got on.

"What did they say when you got back to the train?"

Oh! the quartermaster growled at first, but when Jake 'splained to him he sorter jawed gently to hisself and sez he, "Do n't let it happen again," which we weren't no ways anxious it should.

The Train-Guard's Story.

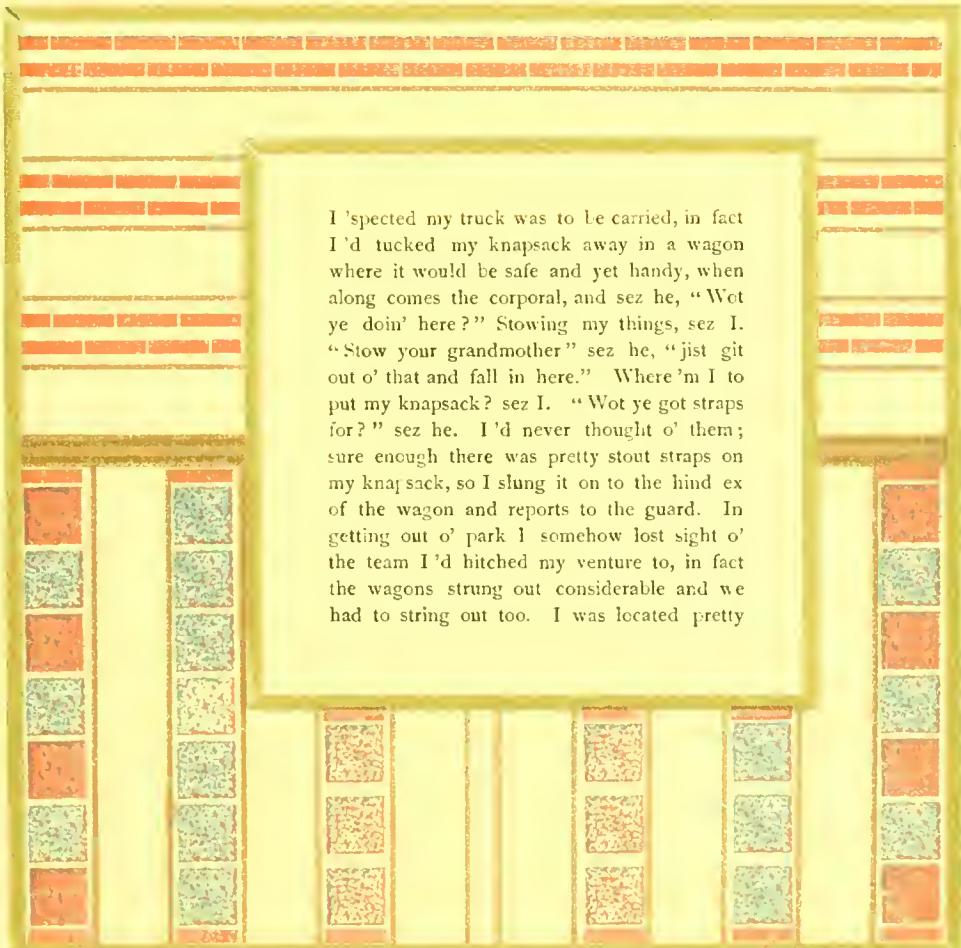
In the summer of '62 I'd kinder soured on things all round, so I looked about for a change. I found a chance for a detail as guard over on the brigade train, and I was n't slow in cottoning to it. The cap'n he sorter growled at losing a man for duty, but he did n't say much as amounted to anything, so I packed my duds and reported over to the wagons. I figured I'd strnck a pretty soft thing, sight to get heaps o' truck carried, and nothing much of any account to do. I



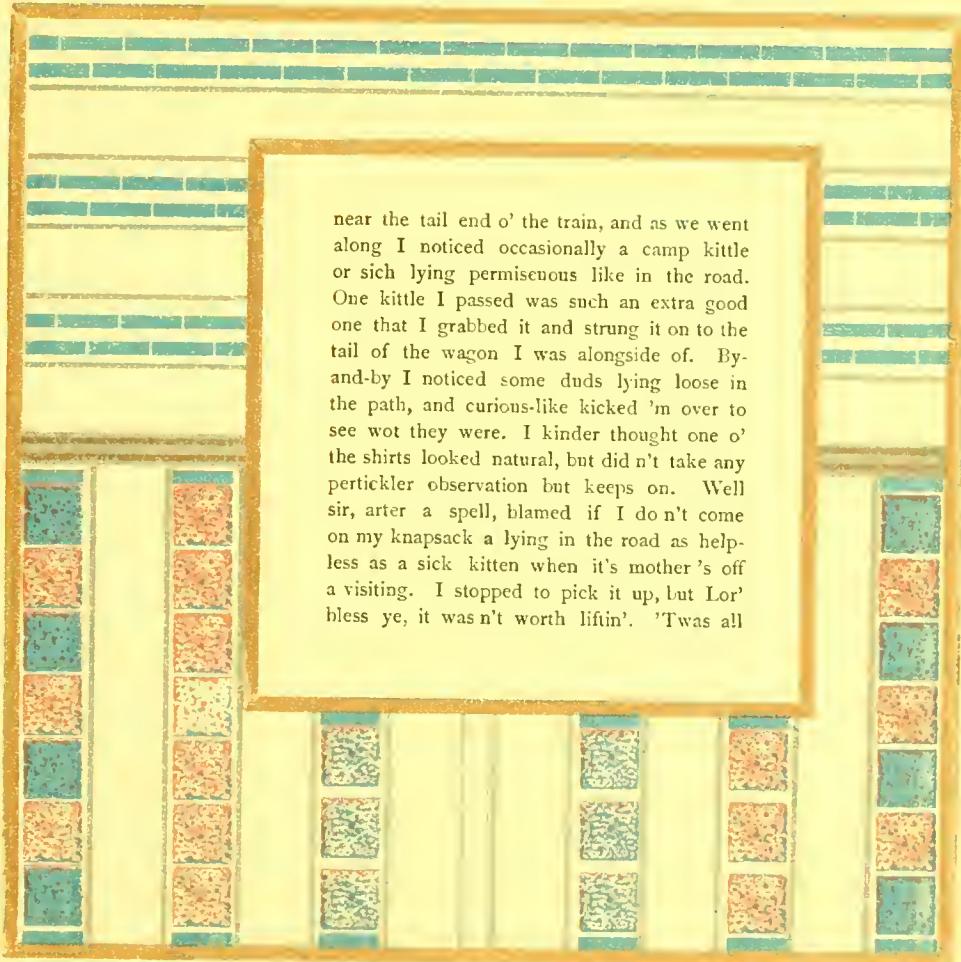
felt as nigh contented as I ever expect to git in this world. Well, the first two days we did nothing but hang round, the train being in park mostly, 'cept what wagons was out doin' haulin' and the like. We had plenty to eat, axes and kittles were sing'rly numerous, and we jist comfortable snug. But on the third day comes—

"A frost, a nipping frost?" queried the Quartermaster.

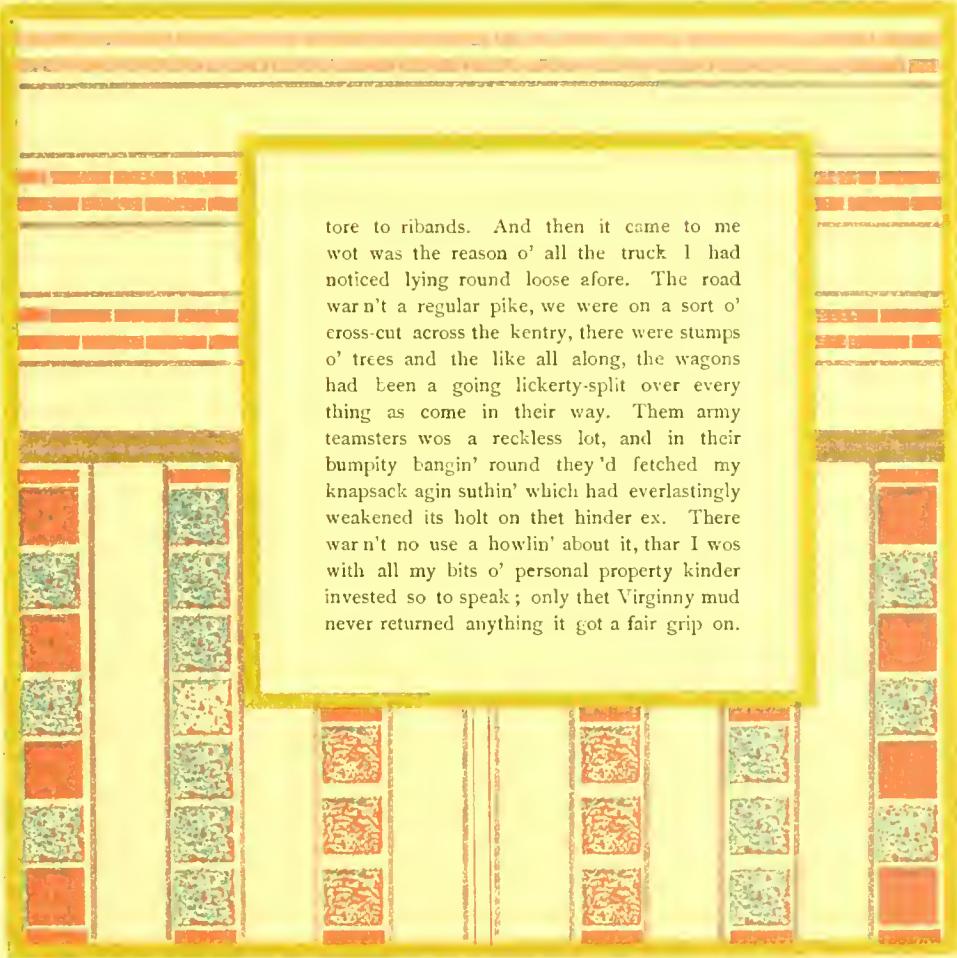
Not exactly, since it was summer time, though come to think on't the nights was pretty cold, and there might ha' been frost though I didn't notice it. Down comes that cussed order to hitch up and pull out. Well sir, we packed up our things and of course



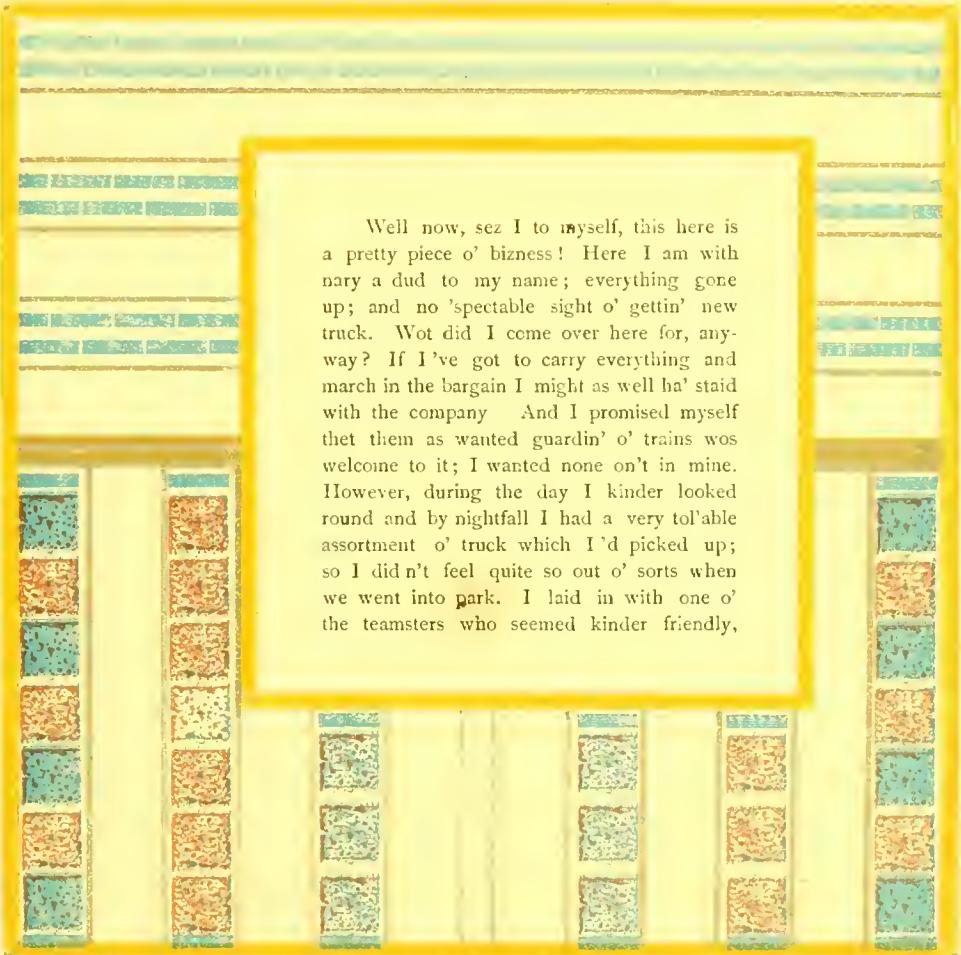
I 'spected my truck was to be carried, in fact I'd tucked my knapsack away in a wagon where it would be safe and yet handy, when along comes the corporal, and sez he, "Wot ye doin' here?" Stowing my things, sez I. "Stow your grandmother" sez he, "jist git out o' that and fall in here." Where'm I to put my knapsack? sez I. "Wot ye got straps for?" sez he. I'd never thought o' them; sure enough there was pretty stout straps on my knapsack, so I slung it on to the hind ex of the wagon and reports to the guard. In getting out o' park I somehow lost sight o' the team I'd hitched my venture to, in fact the wagons strung out considerable and we had to string out too. I was located pretty



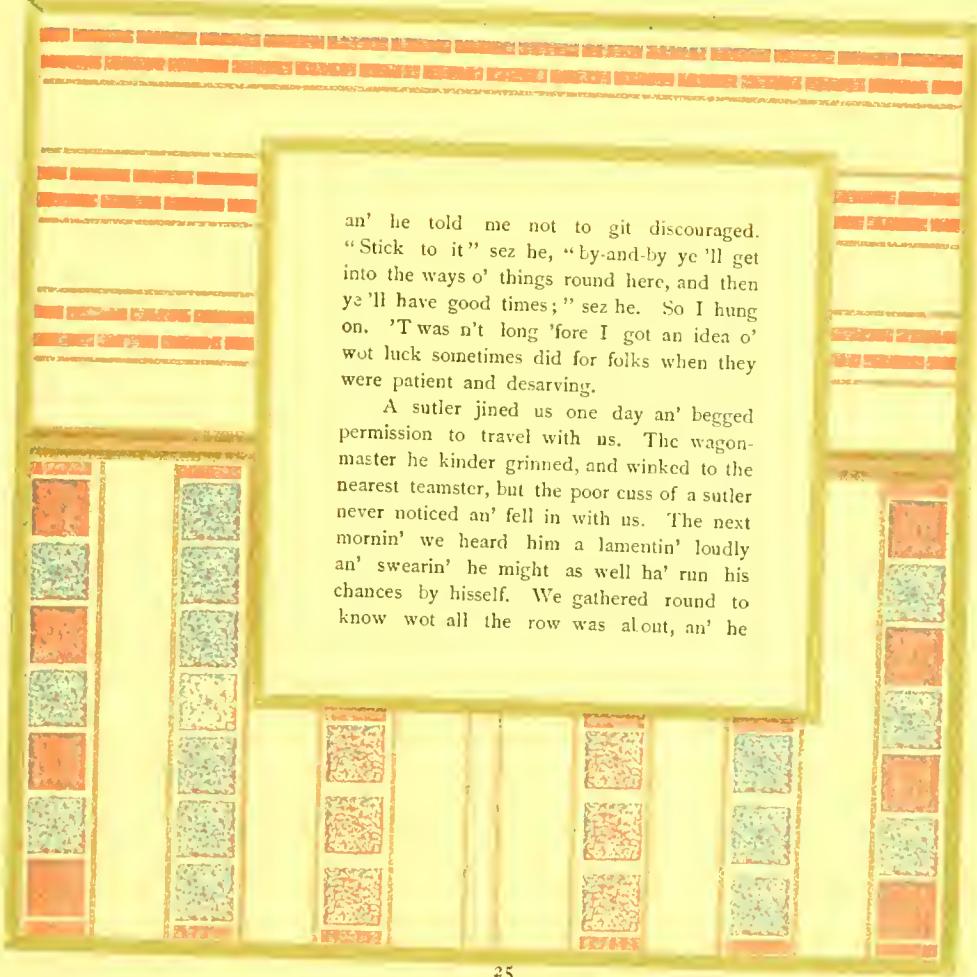
near the tail end o' the train, and as we went along I noticed occasionally a camp kittie or sich lying permisious like in the road. One kittie I passed was such an extra good one that I grabbed it and strung it on to the tail of the wagon I was alongside of. By-and-by I noticed some duds lying loose in the path, and curions-like kicked 'm over to see wot they were. I kinder thought one o' the shirts looked natural, but did n't take any pertickler observation but keeps on. Well sir, arter a spell, blamed if I do n't come on my knapsack a lying in the road as helpless as a sick kitten when it's mother's off a visiting. I stopped to pick it up, but Lor' bless ye, it was n't worth liftin'. 'Twas all



tore to ribands. And then it came to me wot was the reason o' all the truck I had noticed lying round loose afore. The road war n't a regular pike, we were on a sort o' cross-cut across the kentry, there were stumps o' trees and the like all along, the wagons had been a going lickerty-split over every thing as come in their way. Them army teamsters wos a reckless lot, and in their bumpity bangin' round they'd fetched my knapsack agin suthin' which had everlastingly weakened its bolt on thet hinder ex. There war n't no use a howlin' about it, thar I wos with all my bits o' personal property kinder invested so to speak; only thet Virginny mud never returned anything it got a fair grip on.



Well now, sez I to myself, this here is a pretty piece o' bizness! Here I am with nary a dud to my name; everything gone up; and no 'spectable sight o' gettin' new truck. Wot did I ceme over here for, anyway? If I've got to carry everything and march in the bargain I might as well ha' staid with the company. And I promised myself thet them as wanted guardin' o' trains wos welcomie to it; I wanted none on't in mine. However, during the day I kinder looked round and by nightfall I had a very tol'able assortment o' truck which I'd picked up; so I didn't feel quite so out o' sorts when we went into park. I laid in with one o' the teamsters who seemed kinder friendly,



an' he told me not to git discouraged. "Stick to it" sez he, "by-and-by ye'll get into the ways o' things round here, and then ye'll have good times;" sez he. So I hung on. 'Twas n't long 'fore I got an idea o' wot luck sometimes did for folks when they were patient and desarving.

A sutler jined us one day an' begged permission to travel with us. The wagon-master he kinder grinned, and winked to the nearest teamster, but the poor cuss of a sutler never noticed an' fell in with us. The next mornin' we heard him a lamentin' loudly an' swearin' he might as well ha' run his chances by hisself. We gathered round to know wot all the row was about, an' he

'lowed he'd been robbed durin' the night. Well sir, that sutler jawed round free, I tell ye, an' we kinder sympathized with him 'till he said as how it were the drivers an' guards as had been through him.

"In the stilly watches of the night?" suggested the Quartermaster.

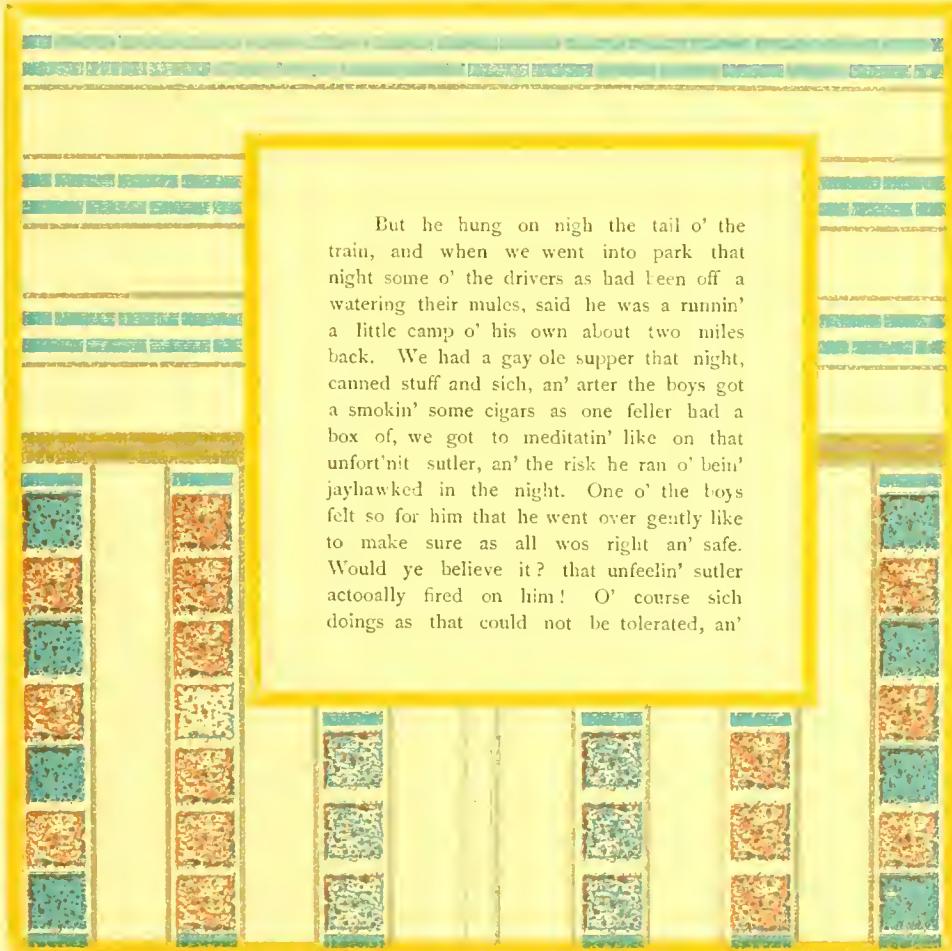
I did n't hear of any tickers bein' found; an' I'm sure he did n't say nothin' o' havin' missed any. Melle they was n't goin', an' so the boys did n't notice 'em. Well, sir, when he began sich insultin' remarks as insinuating wot we were a gang o' thieves — horde o' summat he called us — I forgot what, — it riled us clean through, an' we told him we did n't want none o' his company.

The wagonmaster he kim in, au' sez he,
"Now ye've bit yer own nose off. Wot
little pertection we might ha' leen to ye——"

"'Pertection!'" yelled the sutler, "dam
sich 'pertection,' I want none on 't."

"Pr'aps ye prefer Free Trade," sez the
wagonmaster. "Any way jist git out o'
here. We do n't want no disturbances roun'
the trains; an' we won't hev it."

Well, sir, ye never see sich a crazy man
as that there sutler. He swore so fast he'd
like to ha' strangled hisself a gaspin' for
breath. The wagonmaster he jawed back
for a spell, but by-and-by he gets riled clear
through, and the way that sutler was run
out was a caution.



But he hung on nigh the tail o' the train, and when we went into park that night some o' the drivers as had been off a watering their mules, said he was a runnin' a little camp o' his own about two miles back. We had a gay ole supper that night, canned stuff and sich, an' arter the boys got a smokin' some cigars as one feller had a box of, we got to meditatin' like on that unfort'nit sutler, an' the risk he ran o' bein' jayhawked in the night. One o' the boys felt so for him that he went over gently like to make sure as all wos right an' safe. Would ye believe it? that unfeelin' sutler actooally fired on him! O' course sich doings as that could not be tolerated, an'

next mornin' when we pulled out, the wagon-master he rode back to have it out with the sutler. They rode alongside o' each other a jawin' an' cussin' till they come to a fork in the road; the sutler he wos so busy he never noticed, an' blame me! if his wagon did n't take the wrong road. It seems some fellers had lain back at the fork an' when the sutler passed by a jawin' and swearin', they jist grabbed the driver o' the wagon an' took possession o' the team. 'Twas run up the other road a spell, when the boys halted, took the horses out o' the traces, loaded up with sich truck as they could tote, an' sloped down the road, a leavin' the wagon a lookin' exceedin' sick. They came 'cross the country,



jined the train quietly, turned the horses loose an' then we went on peacefully. We did n't see no more o' that sutler. Likely his time wos valooable an' he had none to spare, a huntin' round after his cattle. Oh, 't was n't sich bad fun, after a body got so as to know the ways an' how to handle hisself.

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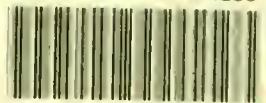
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